

What was DOCUMERICA?

DOCUMERICA was a nationwide photography project run by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA asked DOCUMERICA photographers to establish “a visual baseline” of early 1970s images from which improvements to the environment could be measured. But Gifford Hampshire, the project’s director, encouraged his photographers to seek out what he called “the human connection” to environmental issues. “Where you see people,” he told them, “there’s an environmental element to which they are connected. The great Documerica pictures will show the connection and what it means.” About 70 DOCUMERICA photographers completed 115 assignments between 1972 and 1977.

The project’s records are now held in the still picture stacks at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. In addition to images—almost 22,000 color slides; black-and-white negatives and prints; color transparencies and negatives; and color microfiche—there are 20 boxes of textual material that allow researchers to study the project, its photographs, and its photographers.

The largest series of DOCUMERICA photographs—almost 16,000—have been digitized and are available through the National Archives’ Online Public Access:
<http://www.archives.gov/research/search/>

Visit the “Searching for the Seventies” web page for information on related programs and events:
www.archives.gov/nae

Twitter: @USNatArchives

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Tumblr: <http://usnatarchivesexhibits.tumblr.com/>

YouTube: www.youtube.com/usnationalarchives

Teach with these primary sources on DocsTeach:

<http://docsteach.org/home/70s>

Purchase the *Searching for the Seventies* exhibition catalog and browse the selection of groovy ’70s products, including DOCUMERICA prints and postcards, in the myArchives Store on the Main Level. Proceeds support the National Archives Experience and educational programming at the National Archives. Visit myarchivesstore.org



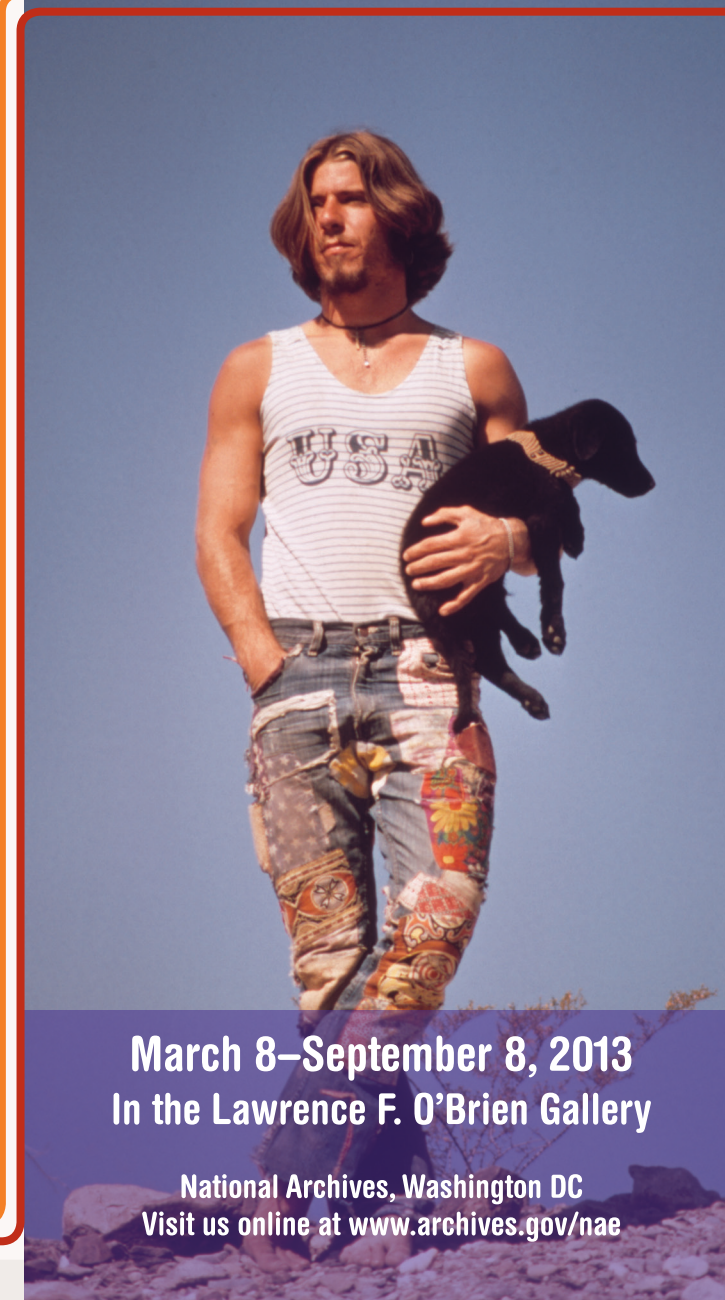
“Searching for the Seventies: The DOCUMERICA Photography Project” was created by the staff of the National Archives Experience. It is based on National Archives holdings, and the National Archives is solely responsible for the exhibit’s content and design.

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Scan here to visit the National Archives Flickr page of the DOCUMERICA project and see more photos. Please remember, photography is not allowed in the gallery.

Searching for the Seventies: the DOCUMERICA photography project



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In the Lawrence F. O’Brien Gallery

National Archives, Washington DC
Visit us online at www.archives.gov/nae

Searching for the Seventies: the **DOCUMERICA** photography project

Bad fashion, odd fads, and disco dance music sum up the 1970s for many Americans. The decade of the seventies is remembered as one of soaring inflation, political corruption, and loss of prestige around the world. But the 1970s were much more than leisure suits, streaking, and disco. Their importance goes beyond high gas prices, Watergate, and Vietnam. During the seventies, profound changes took root in our politics, society, environment, and economy.

Take a new look at the 1970s through the lens of a Federal photography project called Project DOCUMERICA. Created by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1971, DOCUMERICA was born out of the decade's environmental awakening, producing striking photographs of many of that era's environmental problems and achievements. The photographers hired by the EPA took thousands of color photographs depicting pollution, waste, and blight, but they also captured the era's trends, fashions, and cultural shifts. The result is an amazing archive and a fascinating portrait of America from 1972 to 1977.

Ball of Confusion

The 1970s were years marked by environmental and energy crises, inflation, slow economic growth, and high unemployment. Americans debated gender equality, the future of the city, abortion, gay rights, and the reach of government into our lives. DOCUMERICA photographers recorded the issues that were on the minds of seventies Americans.

Look for: pollution and protests

Compare: Birmingham, Alabama, in 1972 and 1977



Everybody Is a Star

During the 1970s, many Americans expressed themselves more vibrantly than in the buttoned-up '50s and early '60s. They also strove for greater personal freedom. DOCUMERICA's color portraits highlighted an increasing appreciation for America's ethnic and cultural diversity and the different ways we chose to "do our own thing."

Look for: changing styles, fashions, and diversity

Compare: seniors in Florida, Colorado, and Vermont; youth in Brooklyn, Rifle, and New Ulm



Pave Paradise

Across America in the early 1970s, suburbs were affluent and growing, but cities were in decline. Places of great natural beauty inspired us, but they were threatened by development and environmental damage. Americans idealized small towns, but they were often threatened by pollution, economic pressures, and population loss. DOCUMERICA photographs depicted this fragmented landscape.

Look for: suburban sprawl and urban congestion, and car culture

Compare: Manhattan congestion, Alaskan wilderness, and Hickory nostalgia; neighborhoods in El Paso, Boston, and Staten Island.

